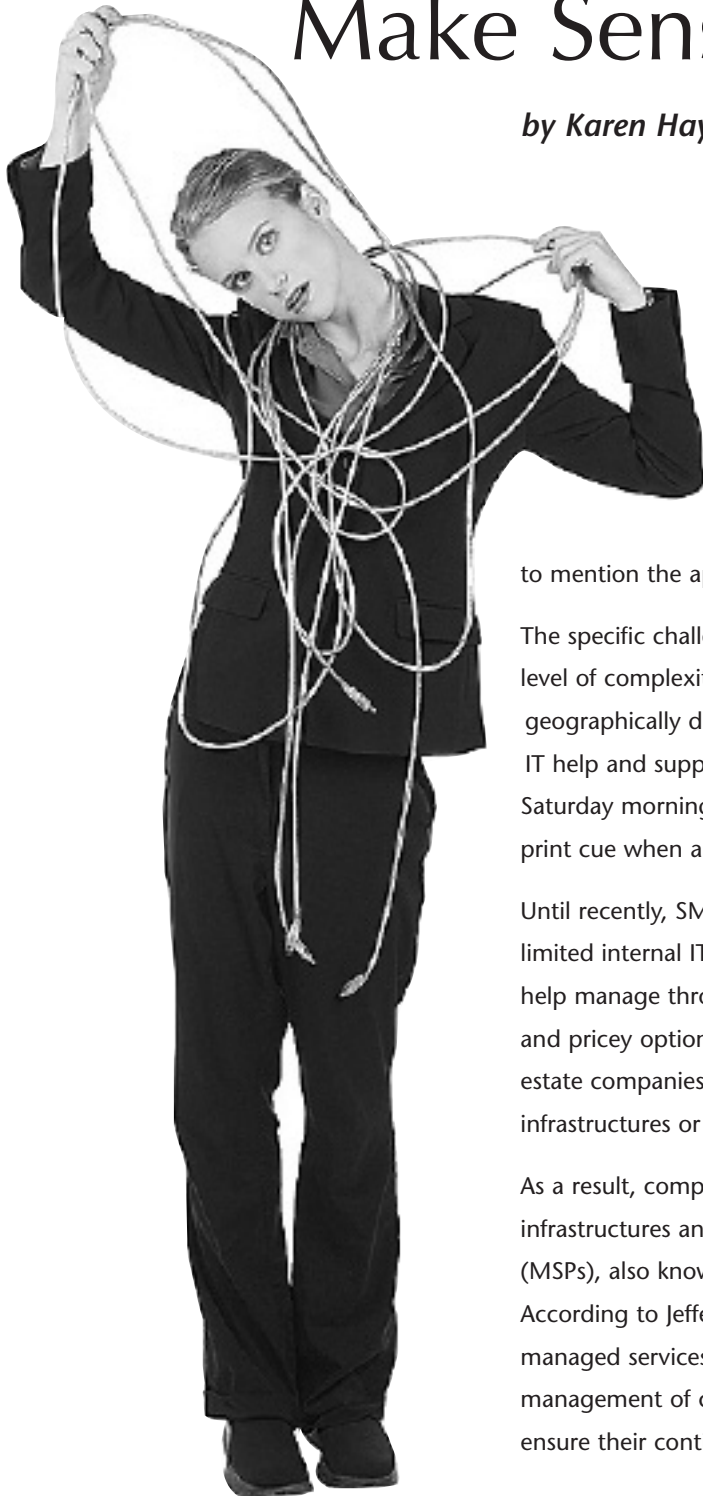


Does Outsourcing IT Make Sense?

by Karen Hayward



As today's IT environment continues to evolve in capabilities and complexity, this complexity often calls for deep subject matter experts to maintain and troubleshoot issues. But the reality is that small to mid-size companies often rely on one or two IT generalists to manage a diverse set of IT disciplines—email, security, patching, network and server management and monitoring. Not to mention the applications that actually run your business.

The specific challenges facing real estate companies add another level of complexity. There's often a need to support several small, geographically dispersed offices with requirements for "real time" IT help and support, including nights and weekends. On a Saturday morning, the last thing you need is an issue with your print cue when a client is waiting to sign a lease.

Until recently, SMBs only had one option: self provision with limited internal IT staff and occasionally bring in consultants to help manage through crisis and upgrades. But this cumbersome and pricey option is no longer feasible. In a sluggish economy, real estate companies are reluctant to make big investments in their IT infrastructures or increase IT headcount.

As a result, companies are beginning to outsource their IT infrastructures and helpdesk support to managed services providers (MSPs), also known as software as a service (SaaS) providers. According to Jeffery Kaplan of THINKstrategies, the definition of managed services is "the on-going, automated and remote management of computing resources and business applications to ensure their continuous availability, optimal performance and



Does Outsourcing IT Make Sense?

Continued from page 9

maximum security." Put simply, you can "offload" the daily hassles of managing your IT infrastructure and have more time available for growing your business.

MSPs offer fractional ownership of a best-in-breed IT infrastructure. By deploying one robust infrastructure to many "shared" customers, each customer pays a fraction of the cost required to host the same IT services in house. And, some MSPs offer fixed pricing so there are no surprises to your IT budget.

There are many factors that could drive a decision to outsource your IT to an MSP. For example, the demands for support around the clock can be taxing on a small staff; they feel they are "always on" and always "on call." This can lead to higher turnover in the SMB space compared to larger organizations where greater career opportunities exist.

The following is a partial list of reasons to consider outsourcing:

- You have between 100 and 3000 employees using PCs
- You need 24/7 support
- You have a mobile workforce that requires remote support across multiple time zones and in different technology environments (site level, regional office, home office, Blackberry®, Treo™)
- You would rather access support expertise on an as needed basis versus staff full time
- You're experiencing too much downtime on mission critical applications like email
- You want proactive management and round-the-clock monitoring of key systems
- You want to ensure all your key databases are backed up and quickly accessible
- You want to mitigate the capital expenditures to buy, implement and upgrade your own technology
- You want your internal IT staff to focus on business driving applications, not routine issues

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- Your organization is highly dispersed geographically and has to support several different locations


The good news is the MSP market has matured to the point where small to mid-size businesses have more options than ever. Hybrid combinations of support are beginning to emerge, providing you more flexibility. Even with a shared infrastructure model, you have the ability to customize your IT solution to meet your unique business needs.

Here are the main points to look for in an outsourced IT provider:

- Fixed cost, regardless of call volume
- 24x7 helpdesk
- Calls answered by desktop engineers, not a dispatch service
- National support (if needed)
- Multiple site support
- Access to subject matter experts
- Clear contract with an easy out clause (typically 60 – 90 day notice)

If you decide to outsource IT, the MSP you select should “feel” like the right fit for your company. The MSP should perform like an extension of your team and integrate easily into your business environment. For a successful partnership, it’s important to choose a partner that communicates well throughout the implementation process for a smooth transition onto managed services.

In summary, outsourcing to a company that specializes in IT network management and support services allows you to offload the headaches of day-to-day IT operations and spend time on growing your business. In fact, several business applications where time to market,

implementation and support used to drain an organization’s resources are now available as Web services. And, with a fractional cost model, you have the opportunity to get the same enterprise-class IT infrastructure and helpdesk support that a Fortune 500 company enjoys, but without over-extending your budget. 



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